

Message Text

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ACTION VO-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SCA-01 /027 W

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P R 301020Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4269

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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FROM REDDEN

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CGEN

SUBJECT: LEBANESE CRISIS AND CONSULAR WORKLOAD IN DAMASCUS

REF: STATE 208741

1. DAMASCUS VISA WORKLOAD HAD INCREASED SHARPLY IN RECENT MONTHS, NOTABLY SINCE THE SUSPENSION OF VISA SERVICES IN BEIRUT, AND IS NOW MUCH GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE. APPLICATIONS BY LEBANESE AND SYRIANS UNTIL RECENTLY RESIDING IN LEBANON NOW MAKE UP 75 PERCENT OF WORKLOAD AS COMPARED TO LESS THAN 10 PERCENT IN 1975. FOR EXAMPLE, BETWEEN JULY 25-AUGUST 24, 1976, DAMASCUS PROCESSED 1,410 NIV APPLICATIONS, 920 OF THEM BY LEBANESE AND AN ESTIMATED 125 BY SYRIANS FORMERLY RESIDENT IN LEBANON, AS COMPARED TO A TOTAL OF 2,049 NIV APPLICATIONS FOR ALL OF 1975, LESS THAN 100 OF WHICH WERE BY LEBANESE. IMMIGRANT VISA FIGURES FOLLOW THE SAME PATTERN. BETWEEN AUGUST 1-15, 1976, DAMASCUS ISSUED 250 IV'S, MOST OF THEM TO LEBANESE AND SYRIANS FORMERLY LIVING IN LEBANON, AS COMPARED TO ONLY 220 FOR ALL OF 1975, 21 OF THEM TO LEBANESE. THE SUDDENNESS OF THE INCREASE CAN BE GUAGED FROM FACT THAT PRIOR TO MAY 1976 THE EMBASSY NEVER PROCESS MORE THAN 35 IV OR 300 NIV CASES IN A SINGLE MONTH.

2. VISA DEMAND AT DAMASCUS WILL IN ALL PROBABLYITY CONTINUE
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AT CURRENT OR EVEN HIGHER LEVELS SO LONG AS VISAS CANNOT BE

OBTAINED IN BEIRUT. CERTAINLY, I FORESEE NO DIMINUTION OF THE WORKLOAD IN THE MEANTIME. IN THIS CONNECTION IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE EMBASSY IS NOT ONLY PROCESSING APPLICATIONS MADE BY FORMER RESIDENTS OF LEBANON NOW IN SYRIA (LEBANESE, SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS, TOGETHER NUMBERING SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND AND PERHAPS AS MANY AS A MILLION-- A FIGURE USED BY THE SARG) BUT ALSO APPLICATIONS OF LEBANESE AND OTHERS CONTINUING TO LIVE IN LEBANON.

3. IN VIEW OF THE GREATLY INCREASED VISA WORKLOAD IN DAMASCUS AND THE SCANT LIKELIHOOD THAT IT WILL LESSEN BEFORE PEACE IS RESTORED IN LEBANON, I FULLY SUPPORT THE EMBASSY'S REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL CONSULAR STAFF SUFFICIENT TO BRING ITS CONSULAR COMPLEMENT TO THREE OFFICERS, INCLUDING THE SECTION CHIEF, AND NINE FSL'S, INCLUDING ONE EMPLOYED FULL TIME ON CITIZENSHIP AND SCS MATTERS. A STAFF OF THAT SIZE WOULD, I GATHER, BE COMPARABLE TO THE FORMER BEIRUT VISA COMPLEMENT WHICH I AM TOLD CONSISTED OF THREE OFFICERS AND EIGHT FSL'S, SUPPORTED BY THE SECTION CHIEF AND HIS SECRETARY, AND HANDLED A MONTHLY WORKLOAD OF 300-350 IV AND 600-700 NIV CASES. THAT WORKLOAD IS RATHER LESS THAN DAMASCUS PROBABLY WILL HAVE TO HANDLE IN THE MONTHS TO COME. ITS NIV WORKLOAD IS ALREADY DOUBLE THE BEIRUT FIGURE AND ITS IV WORKLOAD IS LIKELY TO GO TO 400-500 CASES PER MONTH, JUDGING FROM THE NUMBER OF INQUIRIES AND VISA PETITIONS NOW BEING RECEIVED (89 PETITIONS DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST, FOR INSTANCE).

4. THE DAMASCUS CONSULAR SECTION HAS OTHER PROBLEMS BESIDES LACK OF STAFF. LOCATED IN WHAT WERE UNTIL RECENTLY TWO SMALL ADJOINING APARTMENTS (THE SECTION HAD ONLY ONE OF THESE UNTIL TWO WEEKS AGO), THE SECTION'S PRESENT OFFICE SPACE IS INADEQUATE IN SIZE, IMPOSSIBLE TO ARRANGE EFFICIENTLY, AND UNREPRESENTATIONAL IN APPEARANCE. THE ONE WAITING ROOM IS TOO SMALL TO ACCOMMODATE THE MANY CALLERS AND CANNOT BE ENLARGED WITHOUT REDUCING THE ALREADY INADEQUATE STAFF QWORKING AREA. THERE IS ALSO A SHORTAGE OF ESSENTIAL FURNITURE (THREE OFFICERS ARE SHARING TWO DESKS) AND EQUIPMENT, AS AS A COPYING MACHINE. I HOPE THAT BETTER OFFICE SPACE CAN BE LOCATED AND ESSENTIAL FURNISHINGS AND EQUIPMENT BE SUPPLIED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN THE NEAR FUTURE IN ORDER TO IMPROVE STAFF PRODUCTIVITY AND TO PROVIDE SUITABLE PUBLIC RECEPTION AREAS.
DILLERY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NICOSI02566
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760367-0076
From: NICOSIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976087/aaaaaflk.tel
Line Count: 110
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION VO
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 208741
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <05 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEBANESE CRISIS AND CONSULAR WORKLOAD IN DAMASCUS
TAGS: CGEN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006